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China and Africa [Review of Heidi Østbø Haugen, 2013]**

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**Review of Heidi Østbø Haugen. 2013. Changing Markets from Below: Trade and the Movement of People between China and Africa.**

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In many ways this book is work across borders. Theoretically, it is situated at the crossroads between economic geography and anthropology. Methodologically, it combines interview-based and observational methods. And empirically, it focuses on a specific aspect of “south-south” mobility, namely the manifold ways in which mobile goods and people connect places in Africa with those in China.

This empirical focus is timely. The growing importance of African-Chinese trade is emblematic of the apparent shift of trade towards the global south. The same holds for the movement of people. China, which has long been a country of emigration, has to adjust to its new role at the receiving end of migratory flows, and African countries have to come to terms with an influx of Chinese migrants and their impact on regional and local economies.

The papers that form the heart of the book are put into a wider theoretical context in the first part and are connected to two overarching research questions. On the one hand there is a strictly empirical interest in “how Chinese exports to Africa and migration between China and Africa affect each other”. On the other hand, there is a more far-reaching theoretical question, namely how a micro-level perspective on migratory economic practices might enhance our understanding of the organization of global value chains.

The brief introductory section is followed by a detailed overview of two sets of literature that deal with trade flows in a transnational setting: the heterogeneous body of work that has eventually clustered around terms such as global value chains or global production networks; and the emergence of seemingly informal systems of economic exchange that make active use of national differences at a time of eroding territorial borders: suitcase economies. With regard to the former, Heidi Østbø Haugen provides a detailed and well-balanced discussion of the twisted biography of “global value chain (GVC)”-research and illustrates how GVC finally emerged as a common label for research attempting to make sense of an increasingly global division of labor. A pointed and well-argued discussion of three key current developments in this field of research complements this summary. Here, Heidi Østbø Haugen rightly criticizes GVC research for having gradually narrowed its interests towards questions of governance and upgrading, increasingly focused on the integration of people and regions into global value chains, and become preoccupied with corporate strategies and interests. This is criticized as “inclusionary bias” in the literature.

The second set of literature, the debate on suitcase trade, in many ways is introduced as the mirror image of GVC research. While the latter apparently deals with large-scale, long distance trade, the former puts emphasis on smaller scale cross-border exchange. While the latter has been criticized for a bias towards successful integration and improvement, the former starts with rupture and contradictions. While the latter apparently dissolves political boundaries, territorial differences are the very stuff the former thrives on. In addition to this, suitcase trade is also said to be more sensitive towards transnational cultural flows and new forms of migration in sustaining and driving cross-border trade.

Overall, the thorough discussion of “theories of socially embedded economic transactions” in section 2 is an impressive accomplishment. It establishes the theoretical foundation of the thesis, nicely framing the original papers and their specific contributions to these debates.

Section 3 summarizes the methodological approach underlying multi-sited empirical research in Cape Verde, Nigeria and China. The approach taken is ethnographic in the wider sense of the term, combining interview-based with observational methods. The discussion in this section provides an in-depth view of how Heidi Østbø Haugen collected her information and how she analyzed her data. In addition to this, there are well-written reflections concerning the ethics of intensive qualitative research in a “southern” context.

This is followed by section 4 which summarizes the key findings of the journal articles. Overall, the five articles broadly fall into two groups. Articles 1 and 2 approach the linkages between Africa and China more

directly from an economic perspective. They start with the increasing importance of bilateral trade flows between selected African countries and locations in China, and focus on the figure of the migrant trader. Paper 1, published in 2011 in *Forum for Development Studies*, on the one hand explains the increasing presence of Chinese traders in Africa as a direct consequence of the surge in the imports of low-price, low-quality goods manufactured in China. This phenomenon is already documented in the academic literature. What this book adds to the debate is the additional focus on African entrepreneurs who migrate to trade centers in China and play an active role in the strengthening of Sino-African commercial relations. A key contribution of this article is the careful analysis of the relations between Chinese and African entrepreneurs in this context, ranging from outright competition for market share, to the occupation of complementary market niches and examples of cooperation. The paper shows that the migrants' position in the respective value chains crucially depends on the different resources available to them.

Article 2, already published in 2005 and co-authored, is situated in Africa, more precisely in Cape Verde, and provides a more detailed account of the processes at hand from the point of view of Chinese migrant traders. The paper identifies a classical evolutionary pattern, starting with early pioneers who enjoy first-mover advantages and eventually culminating in a process of market saturation as the Chinese diaspora grows. The result is a "market crisis" that puts an established local trade regime into question. And the respective actors react in familiar ways. They try to innovate in-situ, they devalue their assets (price competition, labor exploitation) and they expand in space, that is, they move into ever more remote towns and villages. The paper on the one hand clearly shows how even relatively small migrant populations are capable of influencing how countries are integrated into global value chains. On the other hand the research discussed in the paper is also emblematic of the extent to which changes in market settings and trade structures impact on the economic and personal livelihoods of Chinese migrant diasporas in Africa. This goes as far as turning a climate of trust and togetherness into relations of distance and competition.

The remaining papers approach the dynamics of trade-driven Sino-African relations from the perspective of traders' everyday life, shedding light into the interplay between personal life experiences and business opportunities. Emphasis is on African migrants in China. It is obvious that the state and the variegated ways to regulate migration play a prominent role at different spatial scales. This starts with the Chinese nation-state and its increasingly restrictive migratory regime forcing African migrants to trade one state of immobility for another (article 4), turning them into guest students at Chinese institutions (article 3), or pushing them into the arms of clandestine Pentecostal communities (article 5). In addition to this there are regulatory differences at the subnational regional level which motivate African migrants to relocate into cities with apparently more lenient practices. And finally there is a supranational element as well. China's emergence as a popular destination for African migrants is closely linked to increasingly restrictive policies in the global north.

It is a strength of the book that the empirical material is also used to point to contradictions and unintended effects of certain decisions and measures, thereby taking the agency of migrants more seriously. After all, student-traders skillfully exploit Chinese academic exchange policies, and for every trader that turns into a student there is a student who unexpectedly morphs into a trader simply by making use of the opportunities offered by Chinese trade centers. And Pentecostal churches turn from places of protection into institutions that exert even more pressure to be entrepreneurially successful.

Overall, the papers fit together nicely, each highlighting a different facet of a coherent whole without falling into the trap of explaining away contradictions and inconsistencies. The article summaries in section 4 of part 1 do a very good job, teasing out the connections to the GVC literature and – a very laudable detail – even trying to provide updates on recent developments.

Part 1 ends with section 5 which advances overall conclusions, answering the overarching research aims formulated in the introduction. The first set of conclusions refers to the interlinkages between migration and trade flows. First, it is argued that the empirical material illustrates that migrants may have a large impact on global trade flows, even if they comprise only small populations. The second conclusion concerns the observation that both Chinese and African traders appear to stick to their migration decisions and

business choices even after sustaining long periods of loss. Third, it is concluded that the presence of migrants both at Chinese and African nodes in the value chain further facilitates Sino-African trade as their actions contribute to a diminishing of non-tariff barriers to trade.

The second, overarching research question is similarly answered with reference to three conclusionary remarks. First, Heidi Østbø Haugen points to the specific characteristics of the value chains investigated. She argues that the south-south GVCs studied for the purpose of the thesis are qualitatively different. They are relatively short in spatial reach, move low-value and high volume goods, and exhibit strong degrees of volatility. Second, it is concluded that migrant traders crucially shape the form of the value chains studied. However, and this is a welcome note of caution, this does not mean that profits are shared equally amongst participating actors. There are strong asymmetries with regard to the ability to capture value. This links to the third and final point, the identification of the trade-migration nexus as a highly uneven affair. Articulation with new contexts (business opportunities offered by trade, migratory circuits) necessarily goes along with disarticulation elsewhere: the severance of ties to the first homes in Africa or China, or the dispossession and devaluation of less fortunate people and regions.

All in all, section 5 rounds off a well-structured and comprehensive piece of academic work that I highly recommend to all those who are interested in the emerging dynamics of Afro-Asian mobilities of goods, people and ideas.